

**Forum:** Special Conference on Food Security

**Issue:** Ensuring Food Security as a Human Right

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## Introduction

Food security, as stated by the World Health Summit in 1996, “exists when all people, at all times, have physical economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy lifestyle.” However, for 2 billion people in our world today, this security is anything but guaranteed. With 780 million people experiencing malnutrition, and one out of every eight people facing hunger, food security currently remains a complex situation that is vulnerable to many factors.

United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) reports that hunger is the number one health risk in the world, and it kills more people a year than AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria combined. In addition to that, most of the population that suffers from hunger is most likely also affected by other shortfalls such as malnutrition, malnourishment, and micronutrient deficiencies. Surprisingly, statistics show that there is enough food for everyone in the world; the problem is that not everyone has access to it. It is important to understand that food security is not triggered by just one event, but by many factors in an environment. The most frequent reasons for food scarcity result from insufficient land to grow crops or a deficient income to purchase food. Food security as it stands, is a problem that needs immediate attention and implementation of aid.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Right to Food

The right to food is a human right, as stated in Article 25 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. It declares the right of all humans to be protected from hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity. The right was derived from the ‘Right to an adequate standard of living’ provision of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESC), a multilateral treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1996. States that signed this treaty agreed to take steps towards the full protection of the right to adequate food nationally and internationally.

### Food Security

Food security is the availability of food and an individual's access to it. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), food security has three key aspects that define an individual's nutritional status- food availability, food access, and food use. Food availability is the ability to attain sufficient amounts of food on a quotidian basis, food access is having both the proper economic and physical ability to acquire nutritious food for a healthy diet, and food use is the knowledge of basic nutritional facts, as well as adequate water access and sanitary measures. FAO believes that a fourth facet to food security is the long-term stability of these conditions in an individual's life.

## Malnutrition and Chronic Hunger

It is estimated that around 780 million people are either experiencing malnutrition or chronic hunger today. The two terms can be often misused, as they seem to have similar meanings. However, there are significant differences between these two terminologies. Malnutrition is defined as “a lack of proper nutrition, caused by not having enough to eat, not eating enough of the right things, or being unable to use the food that one does eat”.(Dictionary.com) Malnutrition does not only mean that an individual is not receiving enough food, but also not enough of the *right* food. Chronic hunger on the other hand is a “perpetual hunger, starvation, or famine due to unequal distribution of wealth or social injustice” (definition-of.com). Although malnutrition can be a factor involved in chronic hunger, the two terms cannot be used interchangeably.

## Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC Scale)

The IPC is a standardized scale originally administered by the FAO to improve food security and decision-making on the international level. The scale ranks countries on a scale of 1A-5 (with 1A being the most food secure) in terms of food security, nutrition, and livelihood of the nature and severity of a crisis. It helps international organizations and other benefactors understand the critical condition of a country, and thus give the distressed areas a higher priority in terms of aid. [See <http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/i0275e/i0275e.pdf> (pg. 4) for a detailed IPC scale]

## Staple Food

Staple food is food that is consumed regularly that makes up a significant portion of a standard diet in a given society. Most staple foods contain substances derived from cereals such as rice, rye, wheat, barley, or from starchy vegetables such as yams, potatoes, and taro. Other categories of staple foods include animal products and ‘roots and tubers’. The fluctuation of staple food prices is a leading cause of food insecurity.

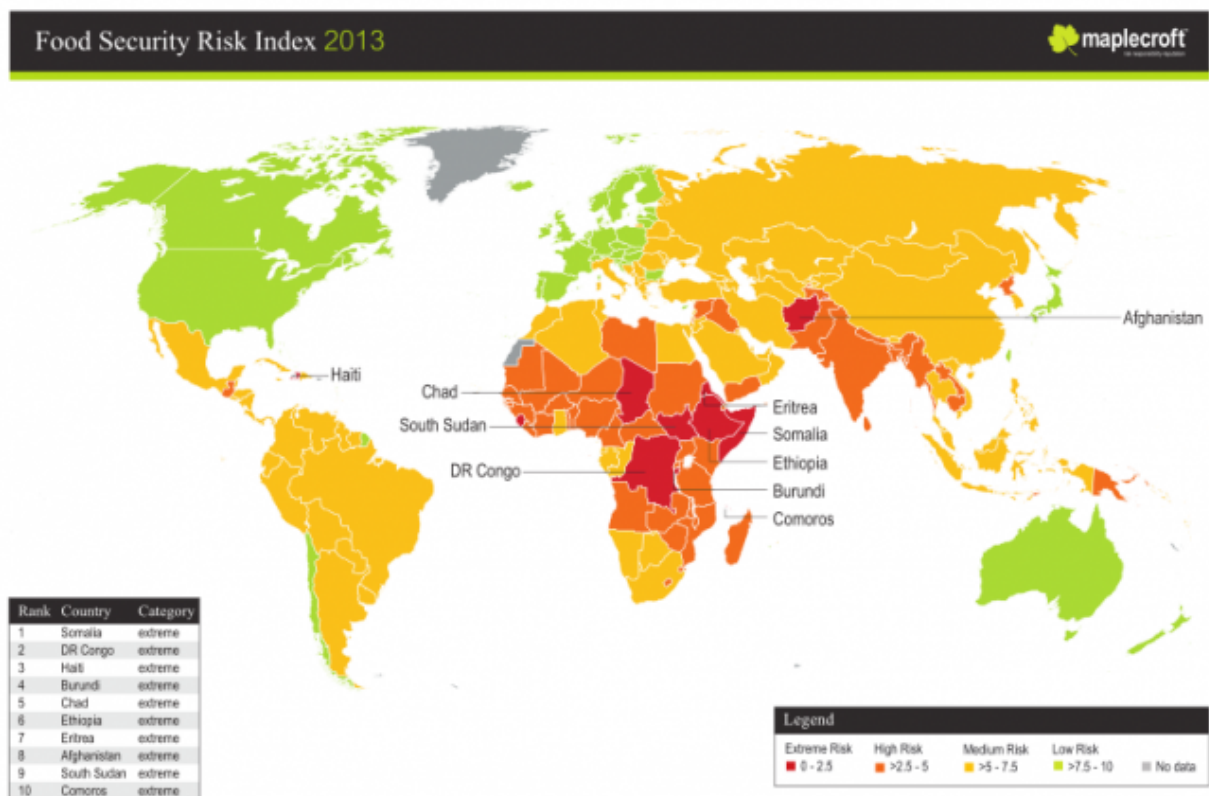
## General Overview

### Origins

The concept of 'food security' originated in the mid 1970s during the time of a global food crisis. During that time, discussions targeting this crisis primarily focused on food supply problems, and ensuring the price stability of basic staple food at the international and national level. In response to this food crisis, 135 state representatives gathered at the World Food Conference of 1974. The conference resulted in the attending states' adoption of the Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition. This declaration recognized it was the common goal of all countries to eliminate malnutrition and hunger. After the conference, the World Food Council was established as a United Nations organization, to serve as a coordinating body to reduce hunger and malnutrition. However, in 1993, this organization was terminated, and the FAO and World Food Programme (WFP) assumed its responsibilities. In the following years, there have been two other World Food Summits, in 2002 and 2009.

### Causes of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is generally, although not exclusively, a 'rural' problem. It is most typically a factor in third world countries that are not financially capable of supporting their people if an unexpected tragedy or complication should occur. Currently, the highest percentages of food insecurity are in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Although the reasons for food insecurity vary between regions, depending on the climate, economic and political condition, and culture of the area, there are some general trends on the triggers of food insecurity.



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**Picture #1: Map of Food Insecurity Risks around the World (2013)**

### *Poverty and High Food Prices*

Poverty by far is the principal cause of hunger. There are 780 million people who are experiencing chronic hunger and 98% of those people live in developing countries. It is important to understand the interconnection between hunger and poverty and how they contribute to a continuous cycle of these two states. Hunger, and the malnourishment that comes with it, prevents people from gaining enough energy to carry out jobs, get an education, and perform tasks to advance themselves in the social world. In this condition, people living in poverty cannot earn enough money to purchase food for themselves or their families, resulting in food insecurity.

High food prices also impair a person's chance of rising from food insecurity. Obviously, the more expensive a staple food item is, the less of a chance people in poverty can afford it. Causes for high food prices include climate changes and also economic policies. An example of high food prices affecting global food security would be the 2007-2008 World Food Price Crisis where food prices spiked and caused political and economical instability around the world.

### *Climate Change*

Statistics show that the most serious food crises are often preceded by a change in climate: most often drought, flood, or another extreme weather event. This climate change results in poor or unsuccessful harvests, which leads to scarcity of food and subsequent higher food prices. With most cases of food insecurity occurring in rural, third world countries, it adds to the burden of poverty and hunger within that area. Any area that experiences consistent shifting weather patterns is vulnerable to dramatic climate change.

A targeted problem area is the basin of the Himalayan River that is in the vicinity of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, China, and India. If this area should experience any major weather misfortunes, there is a possibility for 2.4 billion people living in that area to be displaced.

Another critical area is the Philippines, which is still in Phase 4 of the IPC scale after Typhoon Bopha hit the country in late 2012.

### *Livestock Diseases, Pests, Agricultural Problems*

Aside from climate changes, livestock diseases and agricultural problems are also culprits for failed harvests. Agricultural pests such as desert locusts, and livestock diseases such as cattle disease, play a large part in triggering food insecurity. An example of this would be an epidemic of stem rust (an agricultural pest) on wheat across Africa and Asia in 2007. Since wheat is a large staple crop, it had a devastating effect and caused major concern within the international community. Agricultural problems such as erosion and soil infertility also make it very difficult

for crops to survive, and thus make hunger and poverty another unpremeditated outcome of this situation.

### *Military Conflict and Political Instability*

War and military conflict often worsen food instability by increasing the number of refugees in an area; with more people concentrated within one region, the more demand there is for food. By the end of 2012, there were about 28.8 internally displaced people (IDPs) and 15.4 million refugees in the world. With so many people displaced in areas where they normally are not situated, it is hard to ensure that everyone will have access to food.

Currently, conflict and food insecurity outbreaks are rising the most rapidly in Syria, Sudan, Mali, Niger, and Chad.

### *Gender Discrimination*

Gender inequality is prevalent in numerous regions of the world today, and is also another great contributor to hunger and poverty. Often times, women will do labor with little or no pay; this greatly impacts their financial capabilities, and their chance of attaining food for their families. WFP claims that, “If women farmers had the same access to resources as men, the number of hungry in the world could be reduced by up to 150 million.” Unfortunately, some cultures in the world still do not recognize women as equals to men, and this issue continues to prevail today.

### *Other (HIV/High Growth Rate)*

Other causes and contributors to food insecurity include AIDS and rapid population growth. AIDS worsens food insecurity in mainly two ways; it reduces the amount of people in the workforce and it also puts a financial burden on poor households.

Statistics show that African and third world countries have the highest growth rate in the world. Niger, for example, increased its population by 6 times in just 60 years: from 2.5 million to 15 million. At this rate, there will be an issue of not producing enough food in addition to not having access to it. Experts estimate that if the current growth rate continues, by 2025, Africa will only produce enough food to support about one fourth of its entire population.

## **Current Standings**

The current major food insecure areas in the world:

### *East and Central Africa*

Household food security in East and Central Africa has improved in the last months of 2012 and early 2013. Nonetheless, people in Ethiopia, Somalia, and South Sudan are still facing

Phase 3 of the IPC, and are in 'crises' states. The most affected area of East and Central Africa is in the eastern areas of South Sudan where Phase 4 emergency conditions remain in effect due to high levels of insecurity and cattle rustling. However, due to regular rainfall, a good 2012-2013 harvest, and a strengthened local currency, other areas of South Sudan have made progress in terms of food security.

### *West Africa*

Although the 2012-2013 harvests were satisfactory, food insecurity still remains in West Africa, mainly due to the aftermath of the 2012 food crisis and high food prices. In northern Mali, conflict persists to disrupt food security. In April 2013, it was reported that there were areas of Phase 3 crises in the north (of Mali) and Phase 4 in the remote areas of Kidal, Gao, and Tombouctou. Phase 2 conditions are expected to rise in the areas of Chad, Niger, and Senegal later on in the year. Due to conflict in the Central African Republic, 45,000 people have fled the country and most have sought refuge in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

### *Syria*

The continuation of the violent conflict in Syria has left the country with major food insecurity that is affecting both food systems and the agricultural livelihoods of itself and its neighboring countries, such as Lebanon and Jordan. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 4.25 million people have been displaced and 1.38 million people have sought refuge in neighboring countries. Within Syria, it is estimated that 6.8 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance. However, WFP is only providing food assistance to some 2 million people. Although WFP has promised that the numbers will augment to 4 million by the end of 2013, more aid is still needed in this critical state. Availability and access to food continue to decline as the country is struggling to generate sufficient income from exports and import critical inputs for the production sector. Hopes for a prosperous agricultural season were low as there was low rainfall in March and April and a disruption of agricultural activities.

### *Philippines*

Currently, the Philippines are the most 'stressed' area in Asia. The IPC round in January 2013 still showed that 2 provinces of the Philippines were still in 'Phase 4' of the IPC scale, 9 in 'Phase 3', and 12 in 'Phase 2'. The provinces with the highest amounts of food insecurity are concentrated around areas when Typhoon Bopha hit and eroded and destroyed agricultural ground.

### *Myanmar*

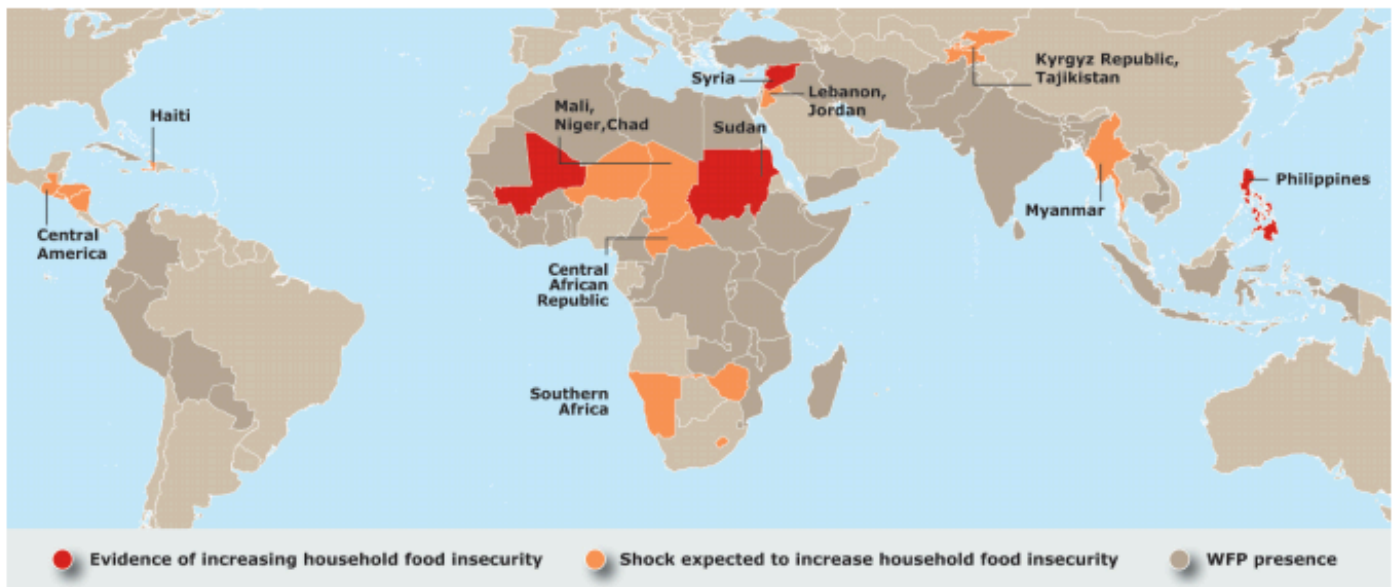
In Myanmar, conflict and communal violence are still present in both Kachin and Rakhine states, and continues to disrupt the well-being and livelihoods of citizens. Recent reports on non-



governmental controlled areas have suggested high levels of acute malnutrition among children, and consequent cases of infant mortality. However, in government-controlled IDP camps, food security among refugees is relatively stable with enough cash to maintain adequate diets.

## Key trends in food security

FEBRUARY – APRIL 2013



*The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.*

**Picture 2: Major food insecure countries as of February-April 2013**

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

FAO is one of the most involved UN organizations in combatting food insecurity. In 1974, it initiated the first World Food Conference in Rome; in 1996, it followed up with another World Food Summit where the Rome Declaration on World Food Security was signed. The declaration pledged that all member states that signed would fulfill a commitment to reducing the number of undernourished people to half the amount by 2015. In 2002 and 2009, the FAO hosted another two World Food Summits. Other major work the FAO is involved in include the Initiative on Soaring Food Prices which aims to help small producers, the HLTF on the Global Food Crisis, and the EndingHunger campaign which is a online campaign against hunger.

In 1974, an intergovernmental body within the FAO was set up to review and follow up the policies concerning food security. The Committee on World Food Security (CFS)'s current goal is to be an inclusive international platform for organizations to collaborate to ensure food security and nutrition for all.

### International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

IFAD is an UN specialized agency founded in 1974 to eradicate rural poverty. It was established after the 1974 World Food Conference. The main goal of IFAD is to empower rural citizens in developing countries to achieve a better life through means of higher incomes and improved food security. Since 1978, IFAD's operations have reached over 370 million poor rural people. In IFAD's Rural Poverty Report, it is stated that the overall extreme poverty rate of developing countries has dropped from 48% to 34% with the main gains in East Asia. However, the report still showed persistent cases of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

### UN High Level Task Force (HLTF) on the Global Food Security Crisis

At the end of April 2008, The UN High Level Task Force was established to manage the spiraling food prices and current efforts towards food security. It is chaired by the UN Secretary General, and is comprised of 22 international organizations including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Labour Organization (ILO), and World Trade Organization (WTO). In July 2008, members of HLTF established a Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) as a plan to alleviate food insecurity. The framework sets actions for short and long-term outcomes needed for sustainable food systems that can withstand any shocks involving fluctuation of the economy, demographic and climatic change, and ambivalent food prices. Currently, the HLTF has succeeded in providing direct support to as many as 20% of the hungry (2008), more than 15 governments in tax policy, and also 5% (out of 2 billion) of the smallholder farmer food production.

### World Food Programme (WFP)

The World Food Programme is the world's largest humanitarian program targeting hunger. Its main goals are to eradicate malnutrition and hunger, with the target of eliminating the need for food aid all together. WFP has four main operation types- emergency operations (EMOPs), relief and rehabilitation operations (PRROs), development operations (DEVs) and special operations (SOs). Every quarter, WFP also publishes a report that highlights and analyzes the critical states of food security around the world. WPF provides food aid on average to 90 million people worldwide in 75 different countries.

### World Bank

The World Bank has funded and created many programs involved with food security. Some of them include Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), Global Food Crisis Response Program (GFRP), and nutritional programs across the world. It also has pledged to increase its spending on agriculture from 4 billion to 6-8 billion.

### Timeline of Events

| Date | Description of event |
|------|----------------------|
|------|----------------------|



|                         |                               |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1972-1974               | Global Food Crisis            |
| 1974                    | World Food Conference         |
| November 13-17, 1996    | World Health Summit           |
| June 2002               | Second World Health Summit    |
| 2007-2008               | World Food Price Crisis       |
| November 16-18, 2009    | World Summit on Food Security |
| Mid 2011- Present       | East Africa Food Crisis       |
| March 2011- Present     | Syrian Civil War/Crisis       |
| 2012                    | West African Food Crisis      |
| November- December 2012 | Typhoon Balboa                |

## Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Rome Declaration on World Food Security, 1974
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESC), 1996
- The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, 2001
- Resolution 50/109 on the World Food Summit, General Assembly, December 20, 1995
- Resolution 6/2, Human Rights Council, September 27, 2007
- Resolution 62/164, General Assembly, December 2007
- Resolution 7/14, Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, March 27, 2008
- Resolution 63/235, General Assembly, December 22, 2008
- Resolution 10/12, Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, March 26, 2009

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

*The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* established in Article 25 that it is a basic human right to have a lifestyle “adequate for the health and well being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services.” Although it is stated as a worldwide right to be free of food insecurity and malnourishment in the declaration, there is still a long way until everyone receives full benefits from these rights.

There have been several attempts throughout the years to alleviate the impact of food insecurity, especially during times of crises. Organizations like Oxfam International, FAO, and WFP have dedicated their time and invested immense amounts of money to research this issue. WFP alone has provided food for 90 million people in 75 different countries. The various committees and assemblies of the UN have also set Food Security as a top priority issue to solve, and have produced resolutions to protect, prevent, and assist the outcomes of food insecurity.

Another notable contribution to the push towards food security is the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) that was launched by the World Bank in 2010 to improve food security for the world's poor. So far, nine countries along with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have pledged a total of \$1.3 billion for food security. This program is currently active in 18 countries.

World Bank also launched another program called the Global Food Crisis Response Program (GFRP) in 2008 after the dramatic spike in food prices at the time. The immediate affects of this program were to boost social protection, bolster countries' fiscal situation, and maintain a short-term stability of food production. In time, through the guidance of the program, the countries shifted to making social protection and food production more resilient to variable circumstances. Currently, GFRP has benefited 65.9 million people in 49 countries.

## **Possible Solutions**

The first step towards solving food insecurity, like all crises, is prevention. The current state of food security in the world is far from ideal. Good progress was made in reducing chronic hunger in the 80s and 90s, but this progress has slowly declined for the past decade. The situation continued to deteriorate after the high price inflation in 2008 that caused a global food crisis. Currently, the UN warns of a looming food crisis in 2013 as global grain reserves hits critical lows, extreme weather fluctuates the climate, and rising food prices threaten disaster. Therefore, safety nets are crucial for preventing and alleviating food insecurity in both the short and long term. If disaster strikes an area, a 'social safety net' can help vulnerability and livelihood risks and help maintain an adequate level of food consumption. Some examples of safety net mechanisms include cash transfer or food vouchers, food distribution, and universal food subsidies.

Agriculture is the largest employment sector in most developing countries, and it is one of the main determinants of the stability of food prices. Therefore, it is an important aspect to consider when finding a solution to food insecurity. A food security strategy that combines an increased productivity in agricultural means and an overall openness in food trade will greatly have a positive effect. Increased productivity will help lower food prices, while trade with other countries will help expand the country's diplomatic relations. However, in order for this to happen, techniques for stabilized productivity and political negotiation will be needed, and market barriers will need to be reduced. Another issue to consider is how to guarantee the safety of the imported food after trade.

Scientists have recently produced new farming technologies that would help aid farmers in producing stabilized amounts of crops every season. If farmers in third world countries could receive these technologies, it would be a great advancement in food security. However, this idea cannot be fully implemented until all countries consent to guaranteeing that their farmers will receive access to these technologies and they are introduced at the right pace so there no negative effects to this process. The ideal situation would have the technologies made with environmental friendly materials to lower the carbon-foot print to benefit the farmers and the environment at the same time.

Previously, investment in small agriculture has yielded success, especially when combined with policies that protect property rights, facilitate trading, and reduce risk. This method has done well in Malawi and Indonesia and can potentially work in other areas as well. Investments that support the establishment and operation of farmer and producer cooperatives have also demonstrated favorable outcomes. Cooperatives can facilitate the exchange of market information, improve access to technology, and enhance water management and logistics– taking us one step closer to food security.

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